

Motivational Leadership: Tips From the Business World

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Abstract

It is an important task for leadership to identify the motivating factors for employees and motivate them to fulfill their individual and organizational goals. Although there are several motivational factors (extrinsic and intrinsic), intrinsic motivational factors such as autonomy, mastery, and purpose are more important for deeper lasting job satisfaction and higher performance. In this article, the authors discuss how an understanding of these factors that influence motivation has the potential to transform an organization.

Key Words: Motivation, leadership, business

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Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.

—Dwight D. Eisenhower

Radiology is a challenging profession that requires in-depth knowledge, lifelong continuous learning to keep abreast of advances in imaging technology, and the provision of high-volume and high-quality service in an era of declining reimbursement and vacation. In an academic setting, there are further demands on time in the form of research, teaching, presentations, publications, journal reviews, and committee and society participation. Recent evolution of the health care system also requires radiologists to provide more value beyond routine image interpretation by being expert consultants [1]. With all these challenges, it is imperative to have a highly motivated radiologist. Equally, it is an important task for leadership to motivate the workforce toward accomplishing organizational goals.

UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION

Motivation is the force that causes an individual to behave in a way that accomplishes a desired goal. There are several motivational theories, focused on content, process, reinforcement, or a combination thereof. Broadly, motivation can be either extrinsic or intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation involves external stimuli that have no functional relationship to a task. It is a contingent motivation; that is, a task is linked to either a reward or a punishment. No pleasure is obtained from the task itself. Intrinsic motivation involves stimuli that come from within and is linked with natural instincts. Pleasure is derived from the task itself, and the individual performs the task because its results are in accordance with his or her belief system or fulfills a desire.

Extrinsic motivation, such as compensation, reward, and punishment, is commonly used to motivate employees. However, Daniel Pink, author of the book *Drive* [2], believes that intrinsic motivation is more important (after the basic biologic needs are met) and is an inbuilt drive in the human nature. The “carrot-and-stick” approach may have worked well for the tasks of the early 20th century, which were typically mechanical (algorithmic) and hence did not require lateral thinking. However, extrinsic motivation is suboptimal for any task that requires anything beyond basic cognitive skills. With tasks in the modern world becoming more complex and creative (heuristic), extrinsic motivation may even be counterproductive because the narrowed

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focus it causes limits a person from seeking creative, out-of-the-box solutions. An interesting study by Glucksberg [3], based on the “candles and thumbtacks problem,” showed that there was poor performance in an incentivized group compared to a nonincentivized group because incentives or rewards reduce creativity and stifle performance in tasks that require flexible problem solving or conceptual thinking. Another study, done by Dan Ariely [4], showed that in complex games, poorer performance was noted in those individuals rewarded with the highest bonuses, irrespective of cultural background. In addition, punishment may be counterproductive, resulting in behavior opposite of what is desired. Hence, intrinsic motivation is more important in performing complex tasks. The assumption that humans are inert and motivated only by rewards and punishment is misguided.

Important components of intrinsic motivation are relatedness, autonomy, mastery, and purpose [5]. Relatedness is the desire to be connected to others. Autonomy is the ability to self-direct one’s life. Mastery is the desire to get better and excel at work. Purpose is the feeling that a task matters and is a part of something larger. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi [6] described a state of consciousness called flow, which is a state of intrinsic motivation whereby an individual is totally immersed in a task without worrying about time or physical feelings, and ego fades away, resulting in deep enjoyment, creativity, and total involvement with life.

KEEPING EMPLOYEES MOTIVATED

The quality and quantity of work are better when employees are highly motivated. The ability to motivate employees to not only fulfill their individual goals but also achieve organizational goals is an important leadership skill. The following strategies are useful tips to improve employee motivation.

1. Hire Individuals With High Intrinsic Motivation

Achieving a motivated workforce is much simpler if the right people are hired. Hire candidates who are not just motivated by money and rewards but those who are highly intrinsically motivated and whose motives align with those of the organization. These individuals produce a high return on investment because they are typically high performers without the need for constant monitoring and may even motivate other employees to work harder. Google hires “smart creatives,” those who are intelligent, intrinsically motivated, and creative. Their

candidate selection is based on predictive analytics (ie, using data from previous interviews and performance of previously selected candidates to predict the likelihood to future hiring success) [7]. Departmental chairs can actively seek such individuals by making intrinsic motivation an employment prerequisite. This can also be assessed actively during the interview process by carefully reviewing candidates’ work histories, finding out their interests outside of work, and asking questions about their past failures to assess their resilience. Candidates’ references, including some off-the-record references, should be asked substantive, open-ended questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates to help make better hiring decisions.

2. Fulfill Basic Needs

Abram Maslow [8] showed that human needs can be arranged in a pyramidal shape, in hierarchies of prepotency. At the bottom are physiologic needs (air, water, food, sleep, etc), followed sequentially by safety (health, personal well-being, financial and employment stability, security), belonging (love, intimacy, family and social cohesion), esteem (self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect, etc), and finally self-actualization. The basic needs should always be met, including a safe, secure, and friendly working environment. With a proactive approach to employee well-being, long-term absences and staff turnover from burnout can be avoided. Wellness initiatives that promote an active lifestyle should be encouraged. Stress reduction training and financial planning services to help employees deal with financial problems should be provided at work. The compensation and benefits package should be adequate to take care of the basic needs.

3. Appropriate Compensation

The Yerkes-Dodson law states that there is an optimal level of arousal for executing tasks and that departure from this level in either direction leads to decline in performance [9]. Too low a salary leads to sadness, and too high a salary leads to excitement, both of which result in poor focus and performance. A meta-analysis by Judge et al [10] showed that those earning salaries in the top half of the data range reported similar job satisfaction to those in the bottom half. A study of 450,000 US residents performed by Kahneman and Deaton [11] found that although life evaluation (thoughts people have about life) progressively improves with income, emotional well-being levels (the emotional

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